

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N^o LXVII.]

Saturday, May 13. 1786.

Studiumque immane loquendi.

OVID.

NO body will deny the superiority of the modern over the ancient world in almost all the arts and sciences. But perhaps that superiority is not more observable when we think of the articles of modern acquirement in detail, than when we consider the facility which the present times have introduced in the art of obtaining knowledge in general; or, when that idea is applied to the young, the highly improved system of Education which we have invented, so much simpler and more concise than that which the ignorance of our forefathers led them to adopt. Were it not beneath the dignity of the subject, one might apply to our present system of education, what some venders of little books of Arithmetic, Mathematics, and Astronomy, have advertised of their performances—it is Education “made easy to the meanest capacities.”

The ancient system for the acquisition of knowledge, was by listening to the instructions of the wise and experienced; and in some of the old schools, a probationary silence of a very long period was insisted on for that purpose. In those times, that might perhaps be suitable enough; but now, when life, according to some philosophers, is so much shortened, and there are so many more things to talk about, the ancient mode would surely be very preposterous. Indeed there is much reason to doubt if, even in ancient times, this method of listening was so much practised as has sometimes been represented. *Pythagoras*, it is presumed, like some philosophers of our own days, chose to talk for all the rest of the company, and enjoined silence to his scholars, that he might have hearers; but *Socrates*, who had been taught better breeding by his wife, let them have more than word about with him. *Plutarch* indeed, another of their wise men, says, in a Treatise upon Education, that “man has two powers, which give him the pre-eminence over all other animals, understanding and speech; that the first is made to command, and the latter to obey; that understanding or mind is superior to accident or fortune, that sickness or disease has no power over it, and that the wrinkles of age do not diminish its beauty; that time, which conquers all things, has no effect on it, but, by a privilege peculiar to itself, it maintains its youth in old age.”

This Plutarch, however, was himself one of the most talkative fellows in the world, and delighted in story-telling beyond any man of his time; and the description he has given as above, of understanding or intelligence, applies equally to the other faculty he meant to set it over, to wit, that of speech. We have every day examples to convince us, that neither loss of fortune, bad health, or old age, has any power over the tongue; to it, indeed, the circumstance of its superior vigour when old applies so strikingly, that one would almost suppose an error in the text, and that there was here a mistake, which those Greeks had a hard word to express, but which signified, that one had put first what should have been last: on this supposition, what the author really meant to say is, that it is the business of the tongue to command, and the part of the understanding to obey.

Now this, when so corrected, is pretty nearly the modern idea, which is, that knowledge is to be acquired fully as much, or rather more, by speaking than by hearing; and this rule, like all other rules of education, is to be attended to from the earliest years. Mothers, who, according to the ablest opinions on the head, are the best instructors of early youth, have particularly an excellent method of inculcating this doctrine on their pupils. As they grow up, these pupils are to be confirmed in the practice of it. When brought into company, they are to be particularly cautioned against that antique bashfulness which used to disqualify young people from this attainment; as far indeed as youth might be used by way of argument for silence, they are to forget altogether their being young, and to talk, with the authority of experience, and the loquacity of age, in all places, public and private. Neither the Church nor the Playhouse is to be excepted; and in public exhibitions of greater moment, if a young man, for example, happens to get into the House of Commons, and gives himself any trouble about what is going on there, it is wonderful how much he may learn merely by speaking, as the daily examples of Orators, who get up without knowing any thing of what they are to talk about, evinces.

There is one part of the course of modern education, which might at first view be supposed unfavourable to this mode of acquiring knowledge, and that is the article of travelling; because it often happens, that from a want of the languages of those countries through which he is to pass, a young traveller cannot speak so much as is proper for the purpose. But this may be almost entirely remedied in *Paris*, and other capitals of every foreign country, by conversing with English only, or with such of the natives as already understand a little of the English tongue, and are very willing to learn more of it, as *Friseurs*, *Tailors*, *Valets de place*, &c. From such companions, one not only may obtain a very competent knowledge of the manners and customs of such foreign countries; but one has also a favourable opportunity of communicating to them the manners and customs of one's own, which can be done with much more freedom and truth to such hearers than to any others. In this manner travel, instead of a hinderance, will be of very great use in promoting this new and improved mode of education; it will promote

promote speaking, and insure an audience, both while a young man remains abroad, and after he comes home; while abroad, he will speak of nothing but his own country, which will enable him to speak of nothing but foreign countries when he returns. This general maxim, which I am here endeavouring to enforce, must however be understood to apply to people of a certain fortune only. With those in less favoured circumstances, hearing and receiving instruction are necessary, at least in particular situations and societies. In company with the great or the rich, which they are at all times to seek after and frequent, they must listen with as unlimited assent, though not with quite so rigid a silence, as the disciples of the Philosopher we first mentioned; but when they leave this society, and get among their equals, they will then have the privilege of communicating what knowledge they have received, and are intitled to impose silence on their auditory, by the decisive authority of these great and rich men, of whose school they are. This leads me to mention a method of acquiring knowledge, the most easy and compendious of any, which is, by growing rich or great one's self; a truth which I have seen many very wise and learned men confess, by the deference they paid to the opinions and information of one lately come to the possession of a fortune or a title, whom, before he attained that wealth or rank, they had been obliged to pronounce very ignorant and uninformed.

But as those who are poor may acquire knowledge instantaneously by growing rich, so those who are rich may in some cases acquire knowledge very rapidly by growing poor. Adversity, says some ancient sage, is the greatest of all teachers; in some of her schools, however, people learn slowly, which was the old method; in others she communicates knowledge with astonishing rapidity, which is the new mode; as, for instance, at that modern seminary of instruction the Gaming-Table. It is indeed surprising, what universality of knowledge is there to be attained, as may be judged of from the manner in which many people in eminent stations, both civil and military, have acquitted themselves, who had acquired the qualification necessary for such appointments at that fountain of knowledge alone.

Another method by which a young man may attain knowledge with very little trouble to himself, is by purchasing a commission in the army. There is something in the bare putting on of a cockade which inspires knowledge, or at least the confidence of it, which answers most purposes as well, and which gives the title to speak, so essential to this modern system of education. Unless the course of his studies be interrupted by actual service, which is not often the case, there are many opportunities of improvement for a soldier, of which, in a civil capacity, he would be entirely deprived. During one half of the year at country-quarters, he has the advantage of that solitude which so many philosophers and poets have panted after as the nurse of contemplation, as the mother of knowledge; the other half he can contrive, by a leave of absence, to spend in the edifying society of the capital. In the first case, he can avail himself of the science of the exciseman, the learning of the curate, and sometimes the knowledge

knowledge of the squire; in the other, he can resort to the sources of that multifarious information which is to be found at the coffeehouse, the tavern, the playhouses, and Ranelagh.

As for the female world, the same rule of obtaining knowledge, or educating themselves, by talking, not listening, is equally expedient, and indeed seems more particularly adapted to the genius of the sex. In this they may, by a prudent choice of their society among the other sex, be much assisted; as they can easily find a pretty numerous class of well-bred young gentlemen, who will never introduce any subject, nor treat any subject already introduced, but in such a manner as does not at all require being listened to; so that every member of the party may with great ease, and without any material injury, speak at one and the same time.

But as I enumerated some very easy and speedy methods of the men's acquiring knowledge, so there is one way, as easy as any of those, by which the Ladies may attain it, I mean by being married; which perhaps is the reason why some prudent and economical mothers defer all sorts of instruction till that period, except some particular pieces of knowledge, which may tend to procure their daughters that opportunity of immediate improvement. In the married state, a young Lady has an increased advantage of that power of talking which I have mentioned as so essential to the cultivation of the mind. Besides the superior privileges of a matron to use her tongue, she has by marriage acquired a necessary assistant for a speaker; she has provided herself with a hearer in her husband.

The Lounger has been favoured with two communications from female correspondents, which, contrary to his established custom, he thinks himself obliged to acknowledge.

Mrs Invoice has told her story in a very natural and forcible manner; and the wrongs of which she complains from the partner of her late husband, exhibit such an impudent abuse of public indulgence, as justly deserves every reprehension a pen so able as hers can inflict. But her recital admits of so directly personal an allusion, as, notwithstanding all its merit, unavoidably precludes its insertion. Though the pictures which this work occasionally exhibits, to be of any value at all, must be true to nature; yet it were equally averse to the feelings of the author and to the dignity of his paper, to make them the portraits of individuals.

The verses of Delia are written with ease and spirit; there is but one objection to their being inserted, their very high praise of the Lounger, which, though it were ingratitude in him not to acknowledge, it might be deemed vanity to publish.

E D I N B U R G H :

Published by WILLIAM CREECH; by whom Communications
from Correspondents are received.

Next Saturday will be published N^o LXVIII.